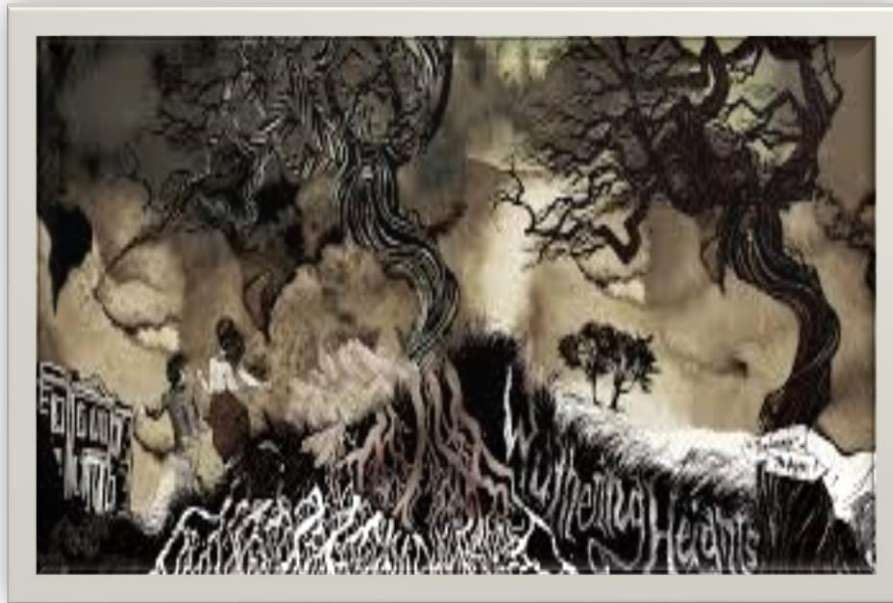


AN APOLOGY FOR INTERMEDIALITY: RE-VIEWING KATE BUSH'S WUTHERING HEIGHTS (1978)



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To Dr. Alexandra Lopes (FCH-UCP)

Sometimes, as lecturers or teachers, we resort to catchphrases, clichés and dichotomies, which ought to be periodically deconstructed and reassessed not just for, but together with, our students. For example, in the field of literary and artistic humanities (including architecture), one usually contrasts "Gothic" and "Classical", as well as "Classical" and "Romantic".³

Hence, by implication, when dealing with some late 18th and 19th century British fiction, it is tempting to correlate "Gothic" and "Romantic", movements which are not entirely coeval, in spite of the role that Gothic sensibilities, modes and textual experiments have effectively played in the emergence and development of their Romantic counterparts.⁴ The very fact that one of the earliest and most famous

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³ "Different conceptions of Romanticism --- which (...) has a close relationship with the gothic --- are certainly appropriate (...) The same could be said of classicism, the aesthetic outlook, which (...) tends to value form and structure above intensity of feeling, and which is often taken to be antithetical to either the gothic or to Romanticism." (Stevens, p. 32)

⁴ In his chapter "Gothic fictions and Romantic writing in Britain", Michael Gamer quotes Robert Hume's assertion: 'That Gothicism is closely related to Romanticism is perfectly clear, but it is easier to state the fact than to prove it tidily and convincingly.' (in Hogle, ed., p. 85), adding: "Taking up this question of the relation between Gothic and Romantic writing, we have embraced each critic's assessment that the relation is complex while abandoning the notion that it should be described through a precise delineation of direct influence." (in

female Gothic writers (Mary Shelley, 1797-1851) was married to a Romantic poet (P. B. Shelley, 1792-1822) seems to connect symbolically both strands, still active in mid-19th century British literature, as we shall see. Literally.

Dichotomies, however useful, are seldom as simple as they look, so let me offer two examples of the need for reevaluation I have argued for:

"The notion of 'incipient Romanticism' and (...) of 'pre-Romanticism' rest (...) upon the implicit belief that in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries there was a definable 'classical' age followed by a (...) cultural change (...) which instituted a definable 'Romantic' age; (...) a view not materially altered when critics introduce a third party called the 'Age of Sensibility' into a supposed chronological gap between the 'Classical' and the 'Romantic' age. Such views are nicely parodied by Northrop Frye, when he writes of the way that many (...) undergraduates learn about English poetry from Pope to Wordsworth: 'Our students are thus graduated with a vague notion that the age of sensibility was the time when poetry moved from a reptilian classicism, all cold and dry reason, to a mammalian Romanticism, all warm and wet feelings.'" (Sambrook, p. 209)

"'Romantic' is an unsatisfactory term but everyone has some idea of what it means. It is evocative rather than descriptive. All poems, all works of imaginative literature, are both romantic and classic. It is a romantic thing to write a poem at all, to explore by means of words the uniqueness and universality of one's (...) experience, to communicate (...) moments (...) of high significance, to record one's solitary musings or ecstasies. To labour so that such records (...) may achieve high and abiding excellence (...) this is to seek the classical ideal. The romantic is the seeking for form, the classic its attainment. In so far as poems communicate the unique awareness of a single exploring consciousness they are romantic, in so far as this communication attains a stable and

ibidem, p. 86) To Fred Botting, "Since the eighteenth century the development of gothic fictions has involved (...) inter-generic patterns, adding a darker aspect to more acceptable literary forms. (...) Romanticism did share an aesthetic history with gothic fiction (...) and a 'darker side' can be found in concerns with creative consciousness: rebellious and freethinking, the solitary visionary can become alienated and outcast; the self can be split in two, its double becoming a figure of imagination or fantasy separated from reality and acceptable models of existence." (pp. 12-13)

successful form they may be called classic. Perhaps one may be permitted to (...) suggest that the poet seeking immortality is romantic, the poem which achieves it is classic." (Dyson and Butt, pp. 85-86)

These quotes, each in its own way, are all the more challenging, since we know, don't we, what happens to Gothic and/or Romantic authors and/or texts who become canonical, like Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) and Emily Brontë's (1818-1848) *Wuthering Heights* (1847);⁵ they also become "classics"...

That said, my purpose is neither to compare Gothic and Romantic fiction nor to list and examine some of their favourite (or 'classical'...) themes, tropes, plots, characters, narrative structures, strategies and devices, settings, scenery, symbols, etc.⁶ In fact, I will focus exclusively on two videos inspired by Brontë's only novel, a text of great emotional intensity and psychological depth. As I will try to suggest, with a view to promoting (more) intermedial and multimodal approaches to the study of literature, these videos, combining words, images and music, embody and convey the two literary traditions mentioned above --- the Gothic and the Romantic ---, thereby acting, so to speak, as 'primary sources' and leading our students from the stage and/or the screen back to the page, thus inviting them to review (and perhaps renew...) their own 'reading' practices and notions of 'readership'.

Born on the same day as Emily Brontë (30th July), Kate Bush (1958-) was only 19 when she launched her first album, *The Kick Inside* (1978). The leading song, *Wuthering Heights*, was an instant hit worldwide and I am sure that, forty years on and irrespective of ages, some people will know or remember it still. This song also inspired several videoclips, available online, and I have selected two for us to watch and comment upon. Let me start with the trailer of the film directed by Peter Kosminsky, starring Ralph Fiennes and Juliette Binoche (Paramount Pictures, 1992): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jnpYIVQz-yg>

⁵ To Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, "(...) if both Brontë and Shelley wrote enigmatic, curiously unprecedented novels, their works are puzzling in different ways: Shelley's is an enigmatic fantasy of metaphysical horror, Brontë's an enigmatic romance of metaphysical passion." (p. 249)

⁶ Suffice it to say that, as Michael Wheeler has put it, "Emily Brontë wrote out of the Romanticism of earlier generations, drawing on the sublime terror of the Gothic novel, (...)" (p. 75). Likewise, David Daiches, in the "Introduction" to his edition of *Wuthering Heights*, points out that "The action of the novel may in some respects be appropriate to remote Gothic castles (...)" (Brontë, p. 12).

As Fred Botting puts it:

"The extravagant effects of gothic and Romantic elements tended, in nineteenth-century fiction, to be refracted through the domestic world central to realism. (...) The home, however, could be a prison as well as a refuge. (...) the home is the site of both internal and external pressures, uncanny and terrifying at the same time. (...)

The desolate, stormy and wild landscape and decaying family house of *Wuthering Heights* embody gothic and Romantic elements that (...) signify darker forces of individual passion, natural energy and social restriction." (p. 122)

Likewise, according to Alison Milbank:

"(...) the Gothic house and the supernatural it unleashes (...) act vampirishly to drain the real of any vitality (...) For it is the Gothic house, (...) not the Romantic expanse of the moor, that is necessary to embody the intensity of feeling (...) of the main protagonists. Its (...) articulation of (...) binary oppositions --- inside and outside, prison and liberation, body and soul, life and death --- makes it a springboard for the supernatural 'real'." (in Hogle, ed., p. 162)⁷

Botting's allusion to home as a prison reminds us of the condition of many 19th century middle-class women, 'angels' trapped or caged in cloistered houses, waiting for "the silent revolution" that would soon give birth to "the New Woman". But, as Elaine Showalter has demonstrated,⁸ another Victorian (male) myth tended

⁷ Taking up Milbank's reference to "binary oppositions", the (twin?) impulses of Love (*Eros*) and Death (*Thanatos*) make *Wuthering Heights* a novel particularly suitable for psychoanalytic criticism.

⁸ See especially Part One, "Psychiatric Victorianism", Chapter 2, "The Rise of the Victorian Madwoman" (Showalter, pp. 51-73), covering the period 1830-1870. According to Showalter, "(...) the prevailing view among Victorian psychiatrists was that (...) women were more vulnerable to insanity than men because the instability of their reproductive systems interfered with their sexual, emotional, and rational control. In contrast to the rather vague and uncertain concepts of insanity in general (...), theories of female insanity were (...) confidently linked to the biological crises of the female life-cycle --- puberty, pregnancy, childbirth, menopause --- during which the mind would be weakened and the symptoms of insanity might emerge." (*Ibidem*, p. 55) and "In a society that not only perceived women as childlike, irrational, and sexually unstable but also rendered them legally powerless and economically marginal, it is not surprising that they should have formed the greater part of the residual categories of deviance from which doctors drew a lucrative practice and the

to (dis)regard and (mis)represent women as somewhat deranged or unbalanced beings, oddly endowed with bleeding bodies and unstable minds, and unpredictably prone to fits of hysteria... the so-called "female malady".⁹ In our second video, Kate Bush's bewitching performance, typified in her choreography and body language, soprano voice, abundant and dishevelled hair, wild eyes and red dress (and indeed there's red all over Kate, from the flower in her hair to her lipstick, neckline, nails and stockings)¹⁰ may suggest male fears and/of female follies while recalling, at the same time, the literary trope of *la femme fatale*, as well as two characters favoured by the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood,¹¹ born in the very year of Emily Brontë's death (1848): Shakespeare's Ophelia and Keats's *La Belle Dame Sans Merci*.

asylums much of their population, Moreover, the medical belief that the instability of the female nervous and reproductive systems made women more vulnerable to derangement than men had extensive consequences for social policy. It was used as a reason to keep women out of the professions, to deny them political rights, and to keep them under male control in the family and the state." (*Ibidem*, p. 73) Finally, Showalter argues that "To find the female perspective on insanity, we must turn to Victorian women's diaries and novels." (*Ibidem*, p. 61)

⁹ "In the new theories of evolution and positivism, in the new biological and medical findings, male scientists and doctors tended to ignore data, which did not fit into traditional views of the sexes and extend theories beyond the limits of data to fit preconceptions of male superiority and female inferiority. (...) Evolutionary theory, so liberating to many of the sciences and social sciences, repeated and reasserted traditional beliefs when it applied to women. (...) That men were active and women passive, that men were superior and women inferior, that men could think and reason and women only feel and reproduce were assumptions which not only remained unchallenged by the new biology, but were also supported by it." (Anderson and Zinsser, II, pp. 151-152).

¹⁰ In his study of colours and their symbolism, Michel Pastoureau presents red as "Cor do amor e do erotismo: Cor da paixão e dos seus perigos. Cor da atracção e da sedução (vermelho nos lábios, acessórios). (...) Cor dos tabus e da transgressão dos tabus." (p. 162); see also Chevalier and Gheerbrant, eds., pp. 831-833.

¹¹ See Sir John Everett Millais' (1829-1896), *Ophelia* (1851-52; London, Tate Modern), and Arthur Hughes' (1832-1915), *Ophelia* (1852; Manchester City Art Gallery); see also, among others, John William Waterhouse's (1849-1917), *La Belle Dame Sans Merci* (1893; Hessisches Landesmuseum, Darmstadt, Germany), Sir Frank Dicksee's (1853-1928), *La Belle Dame Sans Merci* (n.d.; Bristol Museum and Art Gallery) and especially Frank Cadogan Cowper (1877-1958), *La Belle Dame Sans Merci* (1926; private collection).



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fk-4IXLM34g>

To conclude, as James D. Morgan's photos illustrate and Claire Fallon reports, in "(...) the Most Wuthering Heights Day Ever, (...) people around the world recreate the British singer's 1978 (...) music video"

(https://www.theguardian.com/music/gallery/2018/jul/14/kate-bush-fans-mark-most-wuthering-heights-day-ever-in-pictures?CMP=fb_us).

It was forty years ago today.

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ABSTRACT

This essay will focus empirically on two videos inspired by *Wuthering Heights* (1847), Emily Brontë's only novel and a text of great emotional intensity. As I will try to suggest, with a view to promoting (more) intermedial, practical and applied approaches to the study of literature, these videos --- available online --- embody and convey two distinct, though akin, literary traditions (the Gothic and the Romantic), thereby acting as 'primary sources' and leading our students from the stage and/or the screen back to the page, thus inviting them to review (and perhaps renew...) their own 'reading' practices and notions of 'readership'.

KEYWORDS: Emily Brontë; *Wuthering Heights*; Kate Bush.

RESUMO

Este ensaio centrar-se-á, de forma empírica, em dois vídeos inspirados por *Wuthering Heights* (1847), o único romance de Emily Brontë e uma obra de grande intensidade emocional. Conforme tentarei sugerir, tendo em vista promover (mais) abordagens práticas, aplicadas e multimédia ao estudo da literatura, estes vídeos --- disponíveis online --- consubstanciam e veiculam duas tradições literárias distintas, embora relacionadas (a gótica e a romântica), funcionando assim como 'fontes primárias', conduzindo os nossos estudantes do palco e/ou do ecrã de regresso à página e convidando-os assim a rever (e talvez renovar...) as suas próprias noções e práticas de leitura.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Emily Brontë; *Wuthering Heights*; Kate Bush.

